

**Interview with Marshall Morrow
Conducted by Mia Gardiner for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

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Mia: This interview is for the Providence Perspective a Providence District History Project. I have the pleasure of sitting here with Marshall Morrow and I am Mia Gardner and we are going to speak a little bit about the memories Marshall has about this area since he grew up in it. Marshall it is easy to think about you as I drive around here because there is Marshall Drive, and then there is Linda Lane and Duncan Drive which are your sibling's names so you've been here for a while. Welcome. I'd like to start with a little bit of background, in terms of how long you've been here, were you born here, did your family move here after a while?

Marshall: I was born in Takoma Park, Maryland largely through just a coincident of the doctor who was attending my mother at my birth practiced at that particular place. My parents at that time lived in downtown Washington, DC and shortly after my birth in 1936 they move to Annandale and lived there the rest of their lives. I grew up here, went to the local schools here and have lived my entire life in Fairfax County with the exception of a departure for college and the United States Army and some beginning of jobs, so most of my life has been right here.

Mia: What we would really like to hear about are some of the things that you have, stories that you have told us about in the past as we have been together as friends – of how things looked way back when.

Marshall: Back in my childhood the culture of Fairfax County was really very different than it is today. At that time Fairfax County was quite rural and quite traditional, most of the people who lived here had been here for generations.

My parents were part of the influx of government people that came in with Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. And so my parents were came here. My father was from Milwaukee and my mother was from California and

they were the first of the wave of government immigrants to the Washington area.

We were very much in a minority - in my graduating class from high school for instance only about 20% of us went on to college and 80% did not. Those figures now have vanished entirely and I would suppose that something over 90% of all current high school graduates go on to some other form of education beyond high school. In those days it was quite unusual, quite rare.

The road system, not surprisingly was primitive, most of the local roads were gravel. I enjoy amusing people by telling them that my father took me out on Braddock Road to teach me how to drive because he was assured that there would not be any other traffic and it was then just a two-lane gravel road. The same was true of Gallows Road, which was a two-lane gravel road and Hummer Road of course was gravel and the only concrete road was Little River Turnpike. The Annandale Falls Church Road at that time was I guess they call it surface treatment where they spray asphalt and sprinkle gravel in it. But those days of primitive roads have yielded now to multi lane modern highways everywhere you look.

Mia: Which elementary school did you go to?

Marshall: I went to the Annandale Elementary School; I don't believe it is still standing. The original building was an all wood building with wooden floors and was drafty and cold. We had a committee of community ladies who came in every day to make school lunches. Sometime after I left Annandale Elementary to go to Fairfax High School, which is still in business but is owned by the Catholic Church now and it is called Paul VI, I believe. But Annandale Elementary was superceded after I was there by a more modern brick building but even that has now timed out and I don't believe it still stands.

Mia: Where was the location of Annandale Elementary?

Marshall: It was right next to the firehouse between the downtown crossroads in Annandale and the firehouse.

Mia: How many students in your class? Was it a very small school because it was such a sparse population?

Marshall: Well it was - my memory is that we had 8 classes that were divided into 8 grades there was one class for each grade but because my parents were part of a wave of immigration into the area class sizes quickly expanded. And they had to put partitions in the auditorium and make more classes and we had doubled up combinations like 6th and 7th combinations and so forth.

The county experimented with re-dividing things so that the 8th grade was moved into the high school and in fact it was added during my years in school here.

I believe the standard curriculum when I started was 11 years of schooling and they added a 12th year and it was done in the form of putting a 12th grade which was still the senior class in high school. But they sort of inserted a 8th grade as the beginning class of high school and the 1 through 7 in the elementary school remained the standard.

Since then of course they have experimented with several forms of intermediate schools and re-dividing into these super high schools like Lake Braddock that has thousands of kids. But it was very much a growing school system when I was a student here.

Mia: The school system certainly has evolved hasn't it? What about playtime? What did you kids do for fun because nowadays everybody is going to classes and they have so many activities but that wasn't true?

Marshall: We enjoyed what I suppose was sort of the traditional American experience of its time, the children and I was certainly one of them enjoyed a lot of freedom and a lot of unsupervised or relatively unsupervised playtime. We would just sort of disappear into the woods and would do our playing within earshot of our parents. We were called in when it came time for dinner or bedtime but we were pretty much on our own. And the current atmosphere of apprehension and grave concern for the safety of

children out in public space was just non-existent then, it was a more relaxed and I think a happier time. This apprehension - that atmosphere I find oppressive but I guess kids growing up in it – it is just what they expect.

Mia: So the woods that you played in are the woods that are on the side of Gallows Road that right angles with Hummer Road?

Marshall: My father built a small subdivision called Pleasant Ridge, on the, I guess that would be on the North side of Hummer Road that extended, well it was probably included at various times about 2/3rds of the distance along Hummer Road. The far extent of the property the Western end of it would be what is now a Park Authority Headquarters building and the Hidden Oaks Nature Center. That was the house my father built in the late 1940's. He built another group of houses closer to the Annandale Road, Annandale Falls Church Road in the 30's before World War II.

World War II marked quite an important change in the whole Washington area because the initial wave of immigrants that my parents were in from the depression, bloomed into the huge waves of immigrants coming to Washington for the War effort. And that really is where the total character of the Washington area went; from traditional rural America to burgeoning suburban America, and leads even yet evolving towards urban structures. We are losing some of our suburban character now.

Mia: That is certainly true, with the traffic and Tyson's being one of the largest retail areas and office building areas on the East Coast.

Marshall: That was an amusing part of growing up is to watch the transformation of Tyson's it was literally a rural country crossroads with a little two pump gas station and very much a rural country store with hardly any houses around it; one of the poorer areas in Fairfax County, in fact. Today it has moved just a little ways past that. (Laughingly) I believe I read somewhere that it has today more office space than Denver, so it has been quite a change.

Mia: One of the stories that floats around is how Gallows Road got its name and there are so many different theories to that, what is the one that you have heard over the years? Why is Gallows Road named Gallows Road?

Marshall: Well it is kind of vague for me I don't really recall. My information comes in I suppose you could say in my term one of the great historians of the Annandale area was Mason Hurst who founded a small real estate company in Annandale and was a great story teller. And he every year he would come to our elementary school and tell us about the history of the area. His son became a politician in the area and the family has certainly served a lot of roles.

But the story that I recall is that when the British, of course, ran this place as a colony before the Revolutionary War would hold military tribunals and have somebody who needed a good hanging that they would drive out Gallows Road to a place where they had built a platform and a hanging post and they would then hang the prisoner at that location. And my understanding is that was in the vicinity of what is now called Merrifield.

Mia: Oh, it is really close to here I was thinking it was down in Tyson's.

Marshall: Well it does today, Gallows Road extends on into Tyson's I don't believe it did then.

Mia: So Merrifield would have been the Gallows location according to that.

Marshall: That is about where I kind of remember that the old story said it was.

Mia: Now I would like to backtrack a minute when we talked about your childhood and elementary school days we are talking about the early 40's.

Marshall: This would have been the early 40's yes, I attended elementary school through the 40's and I started high school in Fairfax in the late 40's and graduated in 1953.

Mia: I always love hearing you tell about how things use to be such as the “Farm” Gaston Farm that you told me about earlier.

Marshall: Well yes, the Gaston Farm was just up the street if you will, in using modern terms it was a twisty little narrow gravel road at that time

Mia: And this was off Gallows?

Marshall: It was at the intersection of what today is called Trammel Road and Gallows Road and lay between there and Hummer Road. They had cattle and milked cattle routinely and made butter, had a hen house and sold butter, milk, eggs from the back kitchen table in the house there. I remember them as being an elderly couple; Mr. Gaston was quite infirmed but Mrs. Gaston was the one you dealt with. And I can remember being sent with sweaty little fist full of coins up to pay Mrs. Gaston for some eggs or for some cream or whatever it was and bring it back to the house. That farm is long gone and the property has been filled with houses who are occupied by people whom I am sure consider themselves old timers now, but the Gaston Farm is long gone.

Mia: What other kinds of farms or interesting shops were in the area in fact where did your family do it’s shopping?

Marshall: For the routine call it light shopping I guess, the center of Annandale where Columbia Pike joined Little River Turnpike and the Annandale Falls Church Road came in just straight across Little River Turnpike from the end of the Annandale Road was the Carrico General Store.

The Carrico family had run it for many years and in fact Mr. Carrico became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Virginia in his later years. I had a peculiar connection with him because I became engaged to get married and I had not achieved the grand stature of being 21 years of age and at that time a man less than 21 years of age had to secure written permission from is parents to marry. And that permission had to be signed by a Circuit Court Judge. And my parents of course knew Harry Carrico as a neighbor and as a friend and church member and so when the day came that we had to have

the papers drawn up we went to Judge Carrico's house and he did the honors. But yes the Carrico store was the local store where people shopped.

Then once a week my mother went with a car pool of women, car pools were very much the vogue during WWII. They would go together usually go to Falls Church to what was then the newly build Safeway in Falls Church and do their shopping. My memory is that kids were not invited and that part of the car pooling arrangement also involved a kid pooling arrangement so that the ladies could go to Falls Church unencumbered with the little ones. It was sort of an ad hoc version of the modern mother's day out programs that are popular now.

Mia: What about clothes? Where would you go for clothes and shoes?

Marshall: Yes clothes and shoes were very much - we went to Clarendon. And Clarendon had if I recall, Sears and Penny's and some other retailers there so Clarendon was the nearest place where you could go for the school shoes that you bought in September and the Easter Bonnet that was to be worn to church on Easter and that sort of thing.

Mia: You mentioned the church and I know that your family at least your mother was very involved in the Little White Church up in Annandale.

Marshall: Yes indeed. My mother was the daughter of a Baptist Minister and when she came to Annandale as a bride and young mother she sampled the various churches that were available in the area then, the two oldest being the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church and she found a more comfortable home in the Methodist Church so that's where she became active. She stayed congregated in that church clear until she was 98 years old and was by then the longest living member by quite a bit of that church. But, she was very active there, she directed the children's work, the Sunday school and she was a major player in the organization of a Vacation Bible School every summer.

Mia: At what point did the church grow so that they stopped using that very old - how old is that Little White Church, it's quite old I know.

Marshall: I know you can go to the church and verify the dates I can't recall them exactly; but I believe that the original church which was very much prior to the Civil War. And that during the Civil War it was used as a hospital and as a emergency retreat for combatants during the Civil War. And it had actually changed hands a couple of times so sometimes it was used by Union Troops other time by General Lee's troops, the rebels but right at the end of the war it was torched and burned to the ground and was rebuilt in the 1860's. So that building that stands today is about 140 or 150 years old. It was very much in use when I was a child; had a big coal furnace in the basement. Raymond Lynch was a devout parishioner and he made it his business to come up in the winter time at four O'clock in the morning and fire the furnace so the church would be warm for the Sunday School and for the services later in the morning on Sunday. We had Sunday school classes in little, they look tiny now when I look at them, little rooms in the basement and we attended services there. Then right after WWII the congregation grew large enough that they built the first of the brick churches up on top of the hill above the Little White Church. And I believe the building as it now stands is at least the third major building that occupies that site. The old buildings are still there but they have and are incorporated in the, but there are at least two more big additions were made including one rather recently. The current sanctuary has only been in use for 10 years or less.

Mia: What are some of the other landmarks that were there during your growing up years that are still around and what are some of the ones that were important during your childhood that are gone?

Marshall: Well, most everything can be labeled as gone. Because Annandale has gone wave after wave of reconstruction and I would have to think hard if any of the buildings in Annandale that are there today represent buildings that were there very long ago, and I can't think of any. They have all been replaced not once, but most of them more than once as highways have been widened and straightened and retail waves have filled in the space but yes the Annandale Church is still there, the Baptist Church is still there. The Fire House is still in place, has been replace completely it's no longer the building it once was but it is at least on the same ground. The

softball field, baseball field where we played as students at Annandale Elementary became later a Safeway and then that in turn became a bank and I don't even know what it is anymore but that use to be where we played ball.

Mia: Well another place that is still there that I think is so wonderful is that your family home is still there and being used as the center for the Hidden Oaks Nature Center.

Marshall: That is a Park's Authority Office Building and the current office building they added a two-story addition that's probably double the size of the original building, but yes the original building is still there in fact I had the pleasure of taking my grandchildren for a walk there just a week or two ago to show them where the Hidden Oaks Nature Center is built and we walked along the railroad embankment there which is now labeled with historic "do not disturb" signs, but I still have some old railroad spikes that I dug out of the dirt there and we use to play along that embankment and in the little creek down below. That little creek has been so badly abused over the years that is has become little more than just an eroded storm drain now. But at the time I was a child that was a lovely little woodland stream that flowed year round and was full of things to intrigue a child. We wore out the frogs, and the crawfish and the little critters that lived in that creek.

Mia: Well you are still a very big nature lover.

Marshall: Oh yes! I learned it there. I even showed my grandkids exactly where I used to, my favorite place where I use to pitch my tent right next to the stream there at the back of that property. We walked on through to the intersecting stream, which was at that time called Coon Branch that crosses Hummer Road there's a bridge there a culvert on Hummer Road that was a ford where you drove, it didn't have a bridge you had to drive your car through the water at that little stream along Hummer Road. And it was only later that the State, after World War II, that the State built a bridge there, an all weather bridge. But Hummer Road was routinely

closed for a couple months of the year during the winter when the mud got bad and didn't become an all weather road until well after World War II.

Mia: What were some of the places that you remember that are gone, like the farm? I know there was a horse stable down by Woodburn Road.

Marshall: Yes, I am trying to remember, I believe that was the Powell family that owned a riding stable along Woodburn Road. My mother taught school at the Woodburn School for about 10 years and had as students' lots of local people, including I remember the Powell kids went through her classes too. Yes, I certainly remember that. Remembering things that are gone is kind of difficult, houses, buildings come and go and I think I associate history more with people than I do with buildings and of course people are even more portable than buildings and they do come and go.

Mia: Tell us about what your professional career was? You are now retired.

Marshall: I am now retired. I was a construction contractor here in the Washington area for most of my adult life. I ran my own company called Technical Construction, Inc. We specialized in elevator and escalator construction mostly renovating older buildings in downtown Washington, including the White House and Capitol. I have bragging rights to a lot of buildings in Washington, not for the building itself but for the replacement elevators that you can ride in them.

Mia: That is a pretty important part of them.

Marshall: It is an important part. I just recently took my daughter to Walter Reed Hospital, which is not an old building, but it is one that has been around long enough that it had to have the elevators replaced during my career. I replaced 19 elevators in that building, perhaps a decade ago. I came by it naturally, my father was a part time builder; he had a full time job with the Federal Government but on the side he build subdivisions and built houses in Pleasant Ridge along Hummer Road and Chestnut Hills just a little further West on Little River Turnpike.

Mia: Did you do any work with your company in the Providence District area?

Marshall: Gosh, I can't recall very much, I know that we renovated the area of the pool here in Home Run Acres. And when I was a child gosh I call myself a child actually I was a teenager I had part time jobs and a full time job in the summer. I worked with the Broyhill Company building Broyhill Park and Broyhill Crest. I was carrying lumber for the carpentry crews there. I worked on housing along Edsel Road where I worked with the Trust Building crew and then I got transferred to the most interesting job which was putting in the stairways in the basements of those houses.

And I worked on the apartment houses along Holmes Run just right next to Shirley Highway, setting the windows for those apartments. So I did as I was growing up, I work here in this zone. But then in my professional career I mostly worked in the downtown Washington buildings.

Mia: But you stayed in this area and have seen tremendous changes other than the traffic, which is the obvious one. What other changes would you think about that is -

Marshall: Traffic is a funny thing you know they make the joke if you build the roads they will come. Just building more roads causes congestion to become a bigger problem. But that isn't true and I can recall two or three cycles of congestion that were then relieved by the building of Shirley Highway or the building of the Beltway. And that actually traffic conditions today inside the Beltway are very much easier than they were during the period that preceded say the construction of the Beltway which occurred in the early 60's. So things do get better and can stay better.

The sprawl that everyone decries of course becomes stable after a while, there is very little in fill building and eventually everything catches up, the roads, school, and the churches. In fact in some neighborhoods there is even a decline where school buildings become underused and have to be closed, so it's a cycle.

Mia: Let's go back to medical care before Fairfax Hospital.

Marshall: Medical care before Fairfax Hospital, well goodness.

Mia: Where did people go when their kid fell and needed stitches?

Marshall: I guess on this side of the river, Alexandria Hospital and Arlington Hospital were the two post war hospitals that were important. The old Alexandria Hospital in the middle of town was closed many years ago and the new Alexandria Hospital up on Seminary Road replaced it. Arlington Hospital, I don't remember predecessors I know that family medical emergencies usually either went to GW Hospital or Georgetown University Hospital.

Even in my lifetime my twin sons were born at Georgetown and then my daughter was born at Fairfax Hospital so that the times do change and the facilities become closer to home.

Mia: We have hundreds of doctors available to us now right in a one mile area practically. How was the medical care and dental care, I mean how far spread were Doctors - were there a lot around while it was still rural back then or is that something that came after World War II? World War II seemed to be a real turning point.

Marshall: Yes it was. The doctor that my parents used for us kids was I believe his name was Doctor Newman who practiced in Falls Church. He was on East Broad Street. And I don't recall why we went to Dr. Newman other than probably neighbor's recommendations. Dentistry, we went to a dentist downtown, downtown Washington on P Street near the Foundry Church. And there again as a child making those decisions was not part of what I did, I we just went there. Today there are lots of medical complexes everywhere you turn in Fairfax County now.

Mia: What are some of your memories of integration, which of course happened when you were in our teens?

Marshall: It really did not happen when I was in my teens it was just a little bit later than that. When I was growing up essentially black people were invisible. There were small enclaves of black people say over near Merrifield was one, there was one in Burke and a group near Mt. Vernon - but they were not in any way integrated into the community. They didn't appear in a place like Annandale for instance there just were no black people visible in the stores, or in the street, and certainly not in the schools or the churches. So I grew up in a very white suburban and rural part of Virginia and didn't really meet any black people until I went away to college. It just was not an important part of the community here.

The Park Authority house that my father built in 1949 did have two black families living on one edge of the property. In fact I believe part of their property was bought by my father to incorporate into that piece of ground and part of the deal with them was that they could have a lifetime tenancy on the property. They did and in fact when the property transferred to the Park Authority I believe that lien on the property did continue and the family continued to live in the zone where the maintenance buildings are located now. But they were not part of the community beyond driving gravel trucks, and it just wasn't a part of growing up in Annandale. It's a kind of a jolt to walk into a hallway of a modern school here or church or other public collection point and realize that we have become a small United Nations right here in Fairfax County. We have representatives from every part of the world.

Mia: A good jolt though.

Marshall: It's a dramatic change from my childhood, which was very white.

Mia: But then the whole integration issue did not affect you when you were in elementary school and high school?

Marshall: No, not at all.

Mia: That was certainly part of, in addition to WWII, certainly that was a big change that happened in Providence District as it did throughout Virginia.

Marshall: I believe the Governor Battle's massive resistance plan took place when I was away at college and that is when they had riots in Farmville and places like that. That brought integration to Virginia but Virginia had a harder struggle with it than most of the surrounding areas.

Mia: Are there any other Providence District associated memories that you think would be fun to include today?

Marshall: I think I have pretty well run it out. As for Providence District gosh Holmes Run and sitting here in a home in Holmes Run Acres is kind of fun because all of these houses were built when I was a teenager. And I can remember riding my bike around in the muddy roads as they were building these houses. And it's quite a dramatic change to see how beautiful and well settled it has all become. It was once so very new and very raw. The Luria Brothers with their new very dramatic stark architecture compared to the traditional Virginia rural architecture that was then the vogue.

Mia: Well thank you so much for taking the time to visit with me and this certainly will be a very interesting addition to the Providence District History.

Marshall: My pleasure.

[Recording paused]

Mia: Marshall, you were talking about forest fires.

Marshall: Yes forest fires were a surprising important part of growing up in Fairfax County. There is every spring a dangerous period when the weather gets dry and breezy and nothing much green has started and if a fire gets away it can spread very rapidly and cause a big fire to develop from it; and when I was growing up that was a fairly common place event that somewhere in the neighborhood a substantial forest fire would develop and the men would all turn out with shovels and rakes. And we were I believe, the community I lived, in Pleasant Ridge bought some of these

backpack fire pumps for people to have so that if a fire started near by they could come spray a little water on it. It really became the impetus for the organization of the volunteer fire companies in Northern Virginia where they could have equipment that could respond to those fires.

I remember a really large fire that burned the forest where Fairfax Hospital now stands and I remember that burned for a month. It was an active fire for a couple of weeks and the men would go fight and come back and sleep and then go back to fight some more. And I can remember my father working on several big fires not far from us. I know that the property where we live now in Burke today that the trees on my property are all the same age, which leads me to think that it either was burned or went back from cultivation all at the same time.

So, fire shaped the county strongly then and all we are left with today is we have burning bans in March spring weather when you can't burn before 4 o'clock, but that no longer is significant as it was then.

Mia: I never hear that and we have the woods right behind us here and I wonder at some point

Marshall: Sure, but of course at some point Fairfax County had curiously has become more forested than it ever use to be because farming and cultivation stopped entirely during my lifetime and the only farming left is a little bit of rich man's show farming in Fairfax County.

Mia: So you remember what Holmes Acres looked like before the Luria brothers came in.

Marshall: On sure, it was a forest.

Mia: A forest and wasn't it also some farmland too?

Marshall: Could well have been.

Mia: Somebody was raising pigs here I believe.

Marshall: I don't remember that. That may go back before my time. There were no farms on this side of the highway.

Mia: No farms, but it was mostly forested.

Marshall: It was forested, yes.

Mia: Thank you that's an interesting addition.